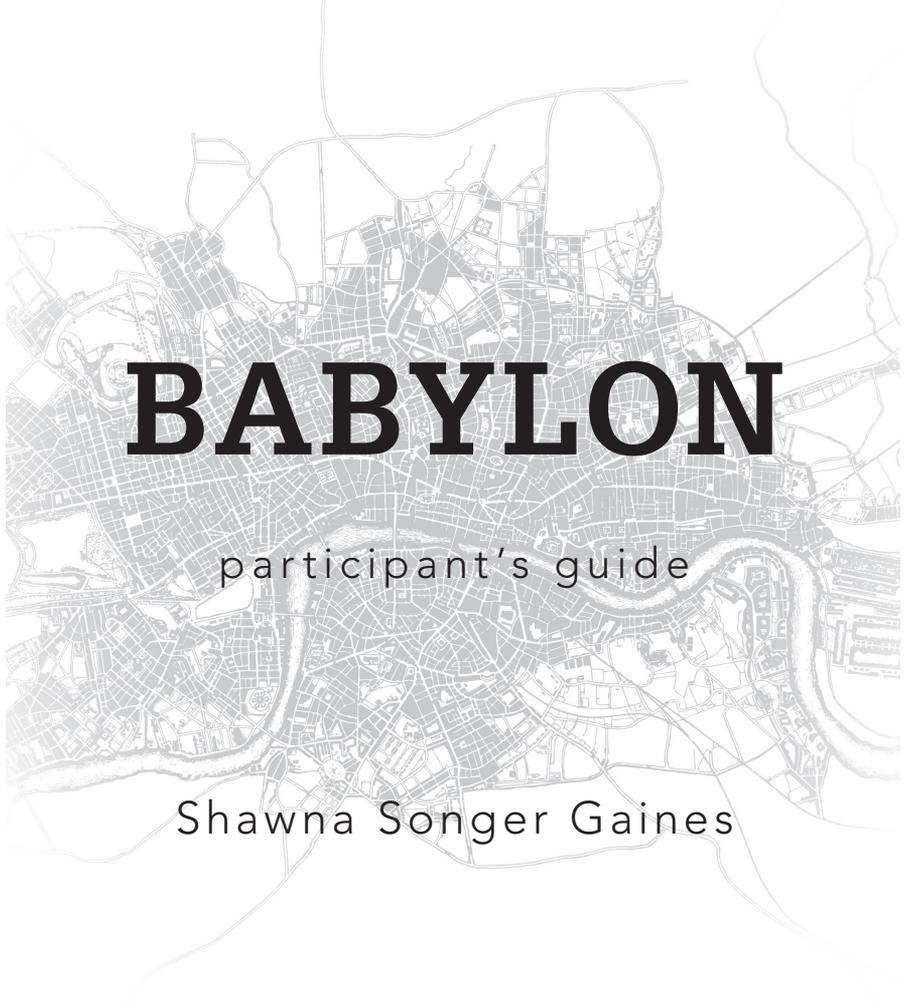


breathe series



BABYLON

participant's guide

Shawna Songer Gaines



BEACON HILL PRESS
OF KANSAS CITY

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Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City
PO Box 419527
Kansas City, MO 64141
www.BeaconHillBooks.com

ISBN 978-0-8341-3547-5

Printed in the
United States of America

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Cover Design: J.R. Caines
Interior Design: Sharon Page

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WELCOME

Thank you for joining us on this journey through *Breathe: Babylon*, by Shawna Songer Gaines. If you haven't gone through a *Breathe* study before, we are delighted to welcome you to your first one. If you are a *Breathe* Bible study veteran, then we are pleased to welcome you back!

We'd like to start by explaining the concepts of biblical theology and hermeneutics, upon which the *Breathe* studies are based.

Biblical theology is a lens for reading Scripture that is set to look for the big story God is telling throughout history. Biblical theology places scripture in conversation with scripture and assumes that every book tells a different perspective of the same story—a story the church is still telling today.

As we study Scripture through the lens of biblical theology, we use another tool, hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is simply a way to explain or interpret Scripture. The three hermeneutical questions we will ask in each lesson are:

1. What do you learn about the character of God?
2. What do you learn about what God is up to in the world—both in the world of Scripture and in our world today?
3. How can we join God's work in the world?



These three questions help us reflect on each passage of Scripture. The questions we ask reveal the lens through which we see God and read Scripture. These questions assume at least three things:

1. God is the primary character in all of Scripture.
2. God's actions are consistent with God's character, which never changes.
3. God calls us to be part of the work God is doing in the world.

As we study Scripture, we must also understand its inspiration. We believe Scripture is the inspired word of God. In fact, we believe it is God-breathed. While it is important that we study and dig into Scripture to learn more about who God is and what God is up to, it is just as important that we always approach Scripture in the power of the Spirit. That is why this participant's guide includes prompts for prayer and allows space to write. These practices help open us up to the Spirit who breathed into the biblical writers and breathes inspiration and revelation into God's people of every generation.

Finally, we need to understand the echoes from scripture to scripture. Because Scripture is breathed by the Holy Spirit, there are echoes of themes that reveal God's character. Even though there is an incredible variety of biblical genres and authors, and even though the Bible was written over a span of roughly 1,500 years, the same images of God's character ring throughout the pages from Genesis to Revelation. The Babylon motif echoes across Scripture because God is calling us to form new visions for ourselves and our communities.

As you work through this study, you may want to refer to this introduction from time to time, to help you recall the tools of biblical theology and hermeneutics.

HOW TO USE THIS PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

This guide is intended for you to use on your own time, between group sessions. In order for each group meeting to generate maximum discussion and learning potential, the idea is for you to complete each chapter of this study before its corresponding group meeting. Each chapter has been written in such a way that is intended to prepare you for your next group meeting without spoiling the content.

You may complete all or part of each chapter as you feel comfortable, and in whatever time frame works best for you. Do not feel pressured to complete a full chapter all at once, or to answer every single question in every chapter, or even to proceed in a linear fashion!

Some of the questions, especially surrounding the scriptures, may require some background awareness or foreknowledge of biblical stories; others won't. Some questions may make more sense after their corresponding group sessions. Or your group discussions and some of the things Shawna says in the videos may give you new insight into some of the questions asked here. That's okay. Work through it at your own pace.

This guide is designed to meet you wherever you are in your faith journey. The one thing we recommend as you work through this participant's guide is to read the introduction paragraphs before



your group sessions. They will directly lead and tie in to the content you will receive from the videos in your group meetings.

We want you to use this guide in the way that works best for you, while remaining open to stretching yourself and growing outside your comfort zone. We pray that you are part of a group where you feel safe being vulnerable enough to grow and that this study facilitates such opportunities. Blessings to you, and may God do a great work in you as you study *Breathe: Babylon*.

1

THE CITY

∞ INTRODUCTION

Babylon is a character that plays a significant role in Scripture, appearing as early as Genesis and as late as Revelation—and many places in between. The city of Babylon often has a negative connotation, but why? It is the historical birthplace of civilization. It is alive and teeming with activity. The city is not an inherently bad place, but Babylon is so much more than a city. It is a way of life that allows and encourages us to put ourselves at the center of everything. God isn't afraid of Babylon, and God isn't absent from Babylon. From the beginning of time until now, God has been moving among God's people to bring about their redemption.

{ **Genesis 11; Jeremiah 5**



What do you learn about the character of God?

What do you learn about what God is up to in the world—both in the world of Scripture and in our world today?

How can we join God's work in the world?



∞ BREATHE IN THE WORD

Genesis 11:4. What is the significance of the people's commitment to building the tower?

Genesis 18:20, Jeremiah 5:1. What do these scriptural echoes tell you about the character of God's people? What do they tell you about the character of God?



Jeremiah 5:29. Through Jeremiah, God accuses the people of no longer having the marks that set them apart—relying on God, doing good, seeking justice, defending the poor. What is your reaction to God wanting to punish God’s own people?

☿ PRAYER

God of provision, I have more than enough in you, but it can be easy to be tempted into thinking I need more, more, more. Help me reclaim the marks in my life of being your hands and feet in the world—focusing on others rather than focusing on what I can build or do for myself. Help me to orient my life toward you and your people, rather than toward myself and my own abilities.



∞ MEDITATE

When we think about idolatry it's often hard for us to make the connection to our lives today. We might conjure up images of golden calves or human sacrifice. In Babylon we see not only a city of idolatry but also things we can more easily relate to—excessive consumption, hubris, and self-reliance. How do we know when and if we have fallen to the temptation to make ourselves the center of our own story? The Bible tells us that where our treasure is, that's where our heart will be. Treasure isn't always one specific thing. It's often a combination of how we spend our time, talents, and resources.

Are we spending our resources to pursue the marks of God's people—goodness, justice, mercy, love, humility? Or have we become intoxicated by the desire to pilot our own destinies, and neglected the work God is calling us to do in the world?



∞ CHALLENGE: TIME BUDGET

Do you know where your treasure is? Are you exalting your own creativity, piloting your own destiny, pulling yourself up by your bootstraps? One way to help us determine our treasure is to look at how we spend our time.

Pick at least one day this week and keep close track of how you spend your time. If you work all day, don't just write down that you were at work from 8:00 until 5:00. Try to break things down into hour-long increments (or even shorter!), from the time you got up to the time you finally put down your phone and went to sleep.

Scrutinizing your routine can reveal where you may be missing opportunities to spend intentional time with God, learning to rely on God.

Are you surprised by any revelations about how you spend your time? Are there any obvious needs to re-prioritize your time to shift the focus away from yourself? How might you do that in the coming week?

